NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
DECISION RECORD
BIG SPRINGS FIRE, X022
BLM/EK/PL2000/041

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Supplement Environmental Assessment BLM/EK/PL2000/041, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Decision:

It is my decision to implement the Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan (NFRP) Supplement as described in the Environmental Assessment for the Big Springs Fire BLM/PL2000/041. Over 1,210 acres of public rangeland managed by the Bureau of Land Management Elko Field Office and 410 acres of private land were burned during this fire. Approximately 1210 acres of the burned public land acres will be rehabilitated by planting of multiple species seed mixtures. Over 4.5 miles of new fence will be constructed in order to establish grazing closures to rest rehabilitated areas. Post-fire grazing management, including the period of time needed for closure, will be determined based on monitoring and achievement of site specific resource objectives.

Rationale:

Implementation of the proposed action described in the NFRP Supplement EA for the Big Springs Fire will protect soils in the burned area, including preventing potential loss of soil due to wind and water erosion; will reduce potential invasion and establishment of noxious weeds and cheatgrass; will provide quality forage for livestock and wildlife; and will facilitate meeting established standards and guidelines for livestock grazing.

The Wells Resource Management Plan is silent for the proposed action. The proposed action is consistent with the objectives of the RMP and is consistent with federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and plans to the maximum extent possible

Monitoring:

Post-treatment monitoring studies will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed treatments and to determine the time frame for reopening lands for grazing.

_____ _____

Helen Hankins
Elko Field Office

Date

NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
BIG SPRINGS FIRE (X022)
BLM/EK/PL-2000-041

Introduction:

This Supplement Environmental Assessment (EA) tiers to the Elko Field Office FY 2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (NRFPEA) BLM/EK/PL2000/037. The Proposed Action includes NFRPEA Treatment # 1 (Construction and repair of fence to facilitate grazing closure), 2 (Planting of multiple species seed mixtures) and 3 (Native shrub or tree seedling planting). The format of this Supplement EA follows the outline in the Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Handbook, BLM Manual Handbook H-1742-1 dated 7/27/99.

List of Preparers:

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Project Area Description:

A. Fire Description:

The fire was started by a lightning strike and was reported on July 17, 2000. It was declared controlled July 19, 2000. The Big Springs Fire burned approximately 1,210 acres of public land and 410 acres of private land. Only one grazing allotment was affected: the Big Springs Allotment, East Big Springs Grazing Area. Burn severity was high as very few sagebrush stubs were left. Two major drainages within the burned area were denuded of vegetation.

B. Vegetation and Soil Description:

The burned area ranges in elevation from approximately 5700 feet on the eastern side near Hardy Creek to approximately 6450 feet on the western side. There are no perenniel streams within the Big Springs Fire. Soils within the burn are shallow to moderately deep with very slow to medium runoff. The hazard of erosion due to water or wind under preburn conditions is slight to moderate. The predominant vegetation was sagebrush with an understory of native grasses and cheatgrass.

Proposed Project Treatments:

A. Revegetation:

1. Wildlife aerial and drill seedings:

Approximately 394 acres of mule deer winter use area will be drill seeded using standard drill seeding techniques with bluebunch wheatgrass and Indian rice grass. The same acreage will then be aerially seeded using prostrate (forage) kochia, big sage brush, Western Yarrow and rice hulls as a seed dispersal medium. Aerial seed would be broadcast between late October through December. If possible, seed would be broadcast on snow to aid in germination and reduce seed consumption by rodents and birds. (See attached specification sheets for seed and seeding rates per acre for this and the following seeding treatments).

Approximately 711 acres above the road on the fan, to the border of the critical deer winter use area will be drill seeded with Siberian wheatgrass (Vavilov) and then aerially seeded with prostrate (forage) kochia, Wyoming big sagebrush, Mountain big sagebrush, and rice hulls. Aerial seed would be broadcast between late October through December. If possible, seed would be broadcast on snow to aid in germination and reduce seed consumption by rodents and birds.

2. Rangeland aerial and seedings:

Approximately 105 acres of the lower easterly arm of the burn below the road will be drill seeded with Russian wildrye (Bozoisky) and Siberian wheatgrass using standard drill seeding techniques. The same acreage would then be aerially seeded with prostrate (forage) kochia and rice hulls.

Application timing would be the same as for the wildlife broadcast seedings described above. The purpose of seedings is to provide forage for livestock and wildlife and reduce the potential for the invasion of invasive, nonnative weed species.

3. Native shrub seedling planting:

Approximately 30 acres of critical deer winter range will be planted with bitterbrush seedlings at 400 seedlings/acre for a total 12,000 seedlings. The seedlings will be planted in the spring using Nevada Division of Forestry honor camp crews.

B. Structures:

1. Fencing:

Approximately 4.5 miles of new fence will be constructed to allow closure of seeded areas to grazing for a period to be determined by post-rehabilitation monitoring. The fences are needed to protect the proposed seeding treatments and to allow for vegetation to become reestablished.

2. Cattleguards:

Two 14' cattleguards would also be installed in conjunction with the new fencing. One of the cattleguards would be installed on the fence line that crosses the road that runs north/south along the lower fan, and the second cattleguard would be installed on the road leading to Shafter.

C. Erosion Control Treatments: None

D. Site Preparation: None

Consideration of Critical Elements and Resources:

The following critical elements of the human environment are not present or are not affected by the proposed action or alternative:

ACECs
Environmental Justice
Farmlands, prime or unique
Floodplains
Wastes, hazardous/solid
Water Quality, surface/ground
Wetlands/Riparian zones
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

Critical elements and resources brought forward for analysis:

A. Air Quality:

The burned area is highly susceptible to wind erosion until revegetation occurs. Wind erosion can increase Particulate Matter #10 (PM#10) emissions causing exceedence of PM #10 air quality standards which can negatively affect human health. In addition, airborne dust can cause visibility and safety problems on roads in the area. The proposed vegetation and fencing treatments will encourage regrowth of vegetation, thus reducing future potential air quality impacts.

B. Cultural Resources:

The Big Springs Fire occurred within an area known to archaeologists as the Central Great Basin

which has been inhabited by humans for approximately 12,000 years. Archaeological sites and cultural properties in this area must be afforded protection whenever possible. Section 106 of the Natural Historic Preservation Act mandates that the federal government will account for cultural resources in its projects and undertakings, including fire rehabilitation efforts. Ground disturbing activities such as discing, drilling, dozer line rehabilitation, fence construction, and road repair could damage cultural sites. Therefore, areas designated for mechanized seeding and other ground disturbance will be inventoried for cultural resources before the disturbance occurs in accordance with the State Protocol Agreement Between BLM, Nevada and the Nevada State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO). At a minimum, to reduce potential impacts to cultural resources, activities that involve mechanized surface disturbance of less than 10 cm depth will generally have transect spacing of 100 meters. More intense inventory will be used for highly sensitive areas. If surface disturbance is greater than 10 cm, then 30 meter transect intervals will be used.

All cultural resources discovered or relocated will be plotted on maps and at a minimum will be recorded on the Nevada IMACS short form. Resources except those previously determined not eligible, by BLM and SHPO, or that have been fully mitigated, will be flagged for avoidance and avoided during rehabilitation activities. Flagging will be placed to minimize the potential for looting and vandalism and removed as soon as possible.

C. Invasive, Nonnative Species:

Fire suppression efforts, including dozer line construction and use of engines and other mechanized vehicles, may have introduced noxious weed species seeds into the burned area. In order to reduce the potential impacts of an invasion of noxious weeds, monitoring must be conducted after rehabilitation treatments are completed. If noxious weeds are discovered to have invaded the burn area, herbicide treatments would need to be implemented to reduce the spread of the noxious weeds. Monitoring and noxious weed treatment would help to prevent or reduce any such noxious weed invasion of the Big Springs Burn area.

D. Native American Religious Concerns:

Native Americans will be consulted as appropriate prior to any ground disturbing activities such as discing and drilling. If traditional cultural properties or other areas having traditional or religious significance to Native Americans are discovered as a result of this consultation, then BLM will insure that measures are taken to avoid or reduce impacts to these areas of concern to Native Americans.

E. Threatened, Endangered, Candidate, or Sensitive Species:

No threatened or endangered plant species are known to occur in the burn area. The sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) has been designated by the BLM Nevada State Director as a sensitive species and therefore afforded the same protection as a candidate species. Although the suspected causes of sage grouse decline are numerous, loss of habitat, including loss by fire, ranks at the top of the list. Rehabilitation of sage grouse habitat, and the prevention of invasion by fire prone annual weeds such as cheatgrass, is a wildlife priority of both BLM and the Nevada

Department of Wildlife. The proposed seeding treatments and rest from grazing pressure are designed to restore sagebrush habitat and/or reduce the impacts from the invasion or re-invasion of fire prone annual weeds.

F. Visual Resources:

The burned area is within Visual Resource Management Class 3 and changes in the area should be subordinate to the existing landscape. Revegetation efforts are designed to blend into the background without attracting undue attention and aid in restoring the area to a more characteristic landscape and reducing visual impacts.

G. Wildlife:

Wildlife was adversely impacted by the Big Springs Fire primarily through temporary loss of habitat through removal of vegetation by the fire. In particular, crucial deer winter range, sage grouse strutting grounds, and antelope year round range were impacted by the fire. The proposed rehabilitation treatments include resting the area from livestock grazing, and seeding several areas with seed mixtures conducive to wildlife use to reduce future impacts to wildlife.

H. Grazing:

The proposed closures to grazing within the burned area would protect seeding efforts and aid in natural revegetation of burned public rangeland, while reducing the potential for future noxious weed and cheatgrass infestations. Grazing closures will also improve future forage conditions for both livestock and wildlife. However, grazing closure and relocation of livestock will have some short term adverse impacts on ranchers in the area who normally use the allotment for grazing. The actual AUM losses suffered by ranchers have not been determined at this point. Through field inventories and monitoring, GIS analyses, and consultation, cooperation, and coordination with individual permittees, specific rest periods and other grazing management options will be identified to reduce impacts to ranchers where possible.

Project Cost Summary: (the cost summary information can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 13 Fire Complex)

Project Maps: (project maps can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 13 Fire Complex)

Cost/Risk Assessment: (the cost/risk assessment can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 13 Fire Complex)

Native/Nonnative Worksheet: (the native/nonnative worksheet can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 13 Fire Complex)